



Fewer Teachers, Less Experienced Teachers Mean Challenges for Wisconsin's Public Schools

August 25, 2015

As the new school year approaches, Wisconsin public schools face significant challenges, including a long-term reduction in resources, student-teacher ratios that have grown faster than the national average, and fewer experienced teachers.

Schools have long been an engine of our state's economic growth. Wisconsin depends on a well-educated workforce, shaped by excellent public schools, to lay the foundation for our prosperity. To ensure Wisconsin is competitive in the future, our schools must have the resources to offer students a high-quality education. Only then can we create a future workforce that is well-qualified and globally competitive.

WISCONSIN'S LONG-TERM DECLINE IN SCHOOL SPENDING CONTRASTS WITH NATIONAL TRENDS

Wisconsin public schools spent less per student in 2013 than they did in 2005, even as school spending per student increased nationally. School spending per student from all revenue sources dropped 4.8% in Wisconsin between those years when adjusted for inflation, while spending rose 3.1% nationally. Spending on both salaries and benefits declined in Wisconsin over this period.

Wisconsin schools still spend more per student than the national average, but the gap has shrunk dramatically. In 2005, Wisconsin schools spent 12.0% more per student than the national average, ranking 13th highest among the states. By 2013, Wisconsin's ranking had dropped to 21st, and Wisconsin schools spent just 3.5% above the national average. Total school spending per student in Wisconsin fell from \$11,780 in 2005 to \$11,281 in 2013.

Most of the money spent by public schools goes to pay the salaries of teachers and other people who help educate students and keep schools running, such as social workers, teacher aides, and janitors. School spending on salaries has fallen faster in Wisconsin than the national average. On a per student basis, Wisconsin schools spent 4.9% less on salaries in 2013 than they did 2005, while the national average fell only 1.9%. Wisconsin schools spend slightly less than the national average on salaries.

As with salaries, spending by Wisconsin schools on employee benefits like health insurance premiums and retirement benefits has decreased. Wisconsin schools spent 8.2% less on benefits in 2013 than they did in 2005. Nationally, school spending on benefits increased by 18.2% over this period. Wisconsin schools still spend more than the national average on benefits, but the gap narrowed considerably over this period. In Wisconsin, about \$1 out of every \$4 of school spending in 2013 was for employee benefits.

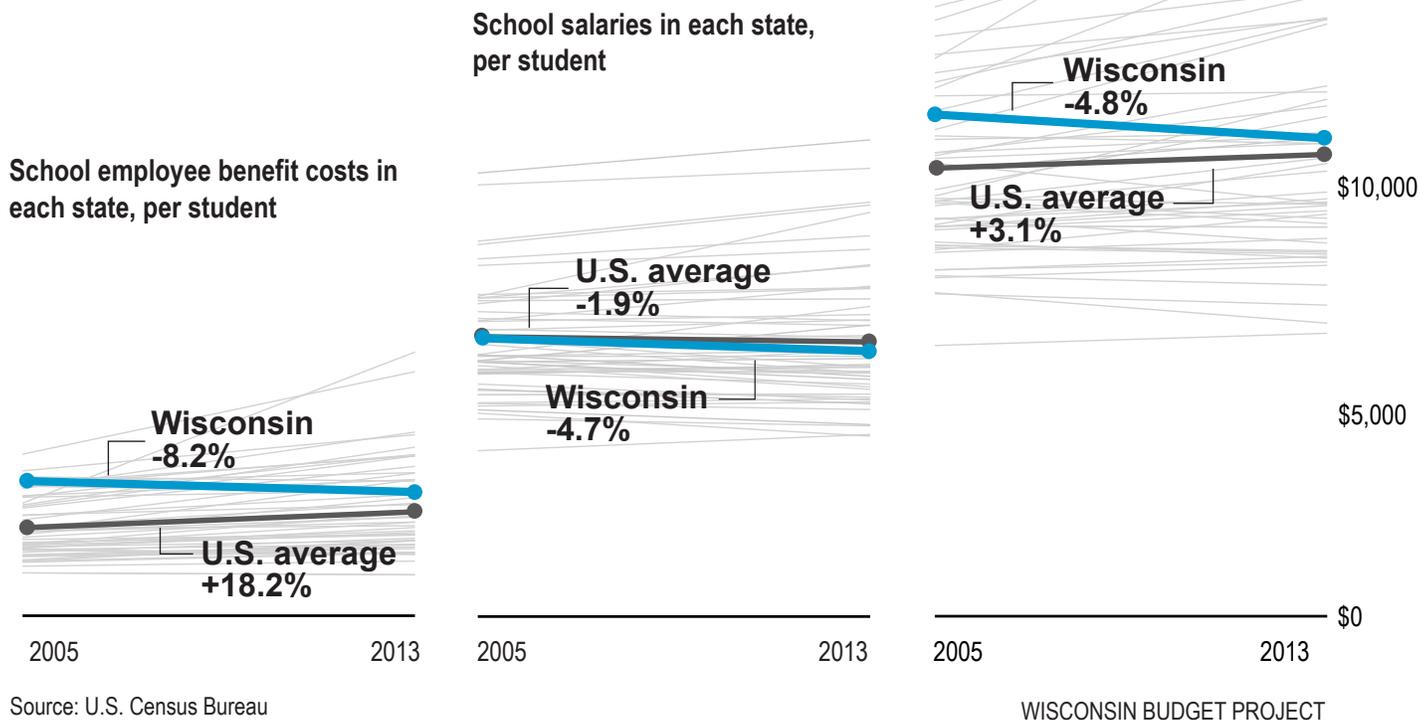
In 2011, Wisconsin lawmakers limited the ability of unions representing public employees to negotiate for salary increases, and shifted some retirement and other benefit costs from public employers to employees. This change, often referred to as Act 10, reduced spending on salaries and benefits in Wisconsin public schools.

FEWER AND LESS EXPERIENCED TEACHERS IN WISCONSIN CLASSROOMS

Wisconsin classrooms have fewer teachers than previously, resulting in increasingly crowded classrooms and less individualized attention for students. Over the last eight years for which there are national figures, the number of teachers in Wisconsin public schools has fallen by nearly 3,000, even as enrollment has increased slightly.

School Spending in Wisconsin Declined, as National Average Increased

Wisconsin public K-12 schools spent less on each student in fiscal year 2013 than they did in 2005, even as school spending per student increased nationally. Amounts are presented in 2015 dollars.



In the 2012-13 school year, there were 57,600 full-time equivalent teachers in Wisconsin public schools, down from 60,500 in the 2004-05 school year — a decrease of nearly 3,000. The decline in the number of teachers in Wisconsin started before changes to collective bargaining rights were approved by state lawmakers in 2011.

The decline in the number of teachers in Wisconsin resulted in higher student-to-teacher ratios in Wisconsin. Having fewer students for each teacher helps students learn better, but in Wisconsin the trend is going in the opposite direction. In 2004-05, Wisconsin had 14.3 students per teacher; that number rose to 15.2 students by 2012-13.

Wisconsin has 0.9 more students per teacher in 2012-13 than in 2004-05; nationally, schools averaged an increase of just 0.2 students per teacher over this period. Put another way, the increase in Wisconsin's student-teacher ratio in percentage terms was nearly five times as large as the increase at the national level. Only seven states had larger increases in student-teacher ratios than Wisconsin between 2004-05 and 2012-13.

Wisconsin still has fewer students per teacher than the national average, but our rank is dropping. In 2004-05, Wisconsin ranked 18th among the states in the number of students per teacher. By 2012-13, Wisconsin's ranking had dropped to 26th.

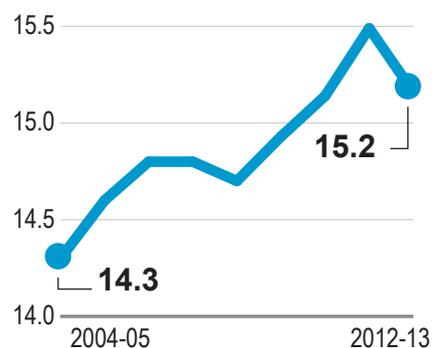
Wisconsin had by far the largest increase in student-teacher ratios compared to neighboring states. Student-teacher ratios in two states that border Wisconsin — Minnesota and Illinois — actually dropped between 2004-05 and 2012-13. The number of students per teacher increased in Iowa and Michigan, but not to the extent that it did in Wisconsin. More recent data that is only available for Wisconsin schools shows a small increase in the number of teachers in Wisconsin, but not enough to significantly affect student-teacher ratios.

Teachers in Wisconsin school districts have less experience than they did a few years ago. In the 2013-14 school year, the teaching staff of 39% of school districts had an average of 15 or more years of teaching experience. That share has fallen dramatically since the 2004-05 school year, when 58% of school districts had teaching staff with an average of 15 years or more experience. Most of the decline in the average number of years of teaching experience occurred in the 2011-12 school year, after lawmakers passed changes that limited the ability of teachers and other public employees to collectively bargain for salary increases, and boosted the amount of money that teachers contribute to their health insurance and retirement benefit costs.

Fewer, Less Experienced Teachers in Wisconsin Schools

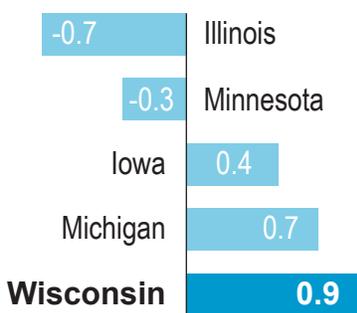
Student-teacher ratios in Wisconsin have increased, more so than in neighboring states.

Student-teacher ratio in Wisconsin

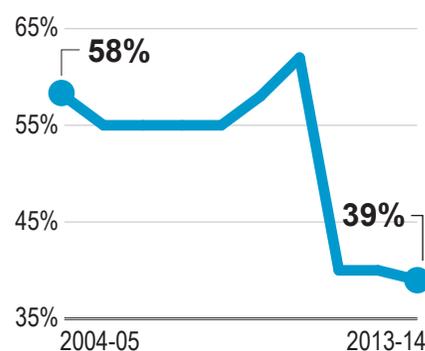


Changes in student-teacher ratios in neighboring states

Change in number of students per teacher, 2004-05 to 2012-13.



Share of districts in Wisconsin with average teacher experience of 15 years or more



Source: National Center on Education Statistics, Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction

WISCONSIN BUDGET PROJECT

BUDGET DECISIONS CONTINUE TO SQUEEZE PUBLIC SCHOOLS

Recent budget decisions by lawmakers ensure Wisconsin schools will continue to face difficult times. Wisconsin school districts get most of their resources through the combination of state aid and property taxes, and lawmakers have placed strict limits on both revenue sources.

In the state budget that runs from July 2015 through June 2017, lawmakers approved an increase of about 2% for K-12 education in Wisconsin, compared to the previous budget period. Much of that money was allotted in a way that will prohibit schools from using it to educate students in classrooms. Instead, schools will be required to use much of that money to offset property taxes and to funnel money to private schools to pay tuition costs for students participating in the state's school voucher program. In the 2015-17 state budget, lawmakers approved an expansion of the state's school voucher program, which will drain an estimated \$600 million to \$800 million from public schools over the next decade, according to an analysis by the nonpartisan Legislative Fiscal Bureau.

In the budget, lawmakers also limited property tax increases by freezing the amount of money per student that Wisconsin school districts may take in between the combination of general state aid and property taxes. In general, school districts will not be able to increase property taxes to deal with increases in fuel costs, to address maintenance needs, or to help deal with other rising costs. As spending capacity lags behind educational needs, many districts will be forced to reduce academic offerings, further reduce salaries for experienced teachers, or find other ways to cut corners.

At the same time lawmakers were approving minimal increases in state support for public schools and tight controls school budgets, they were focused on cutting taxes. In the 2015-17 budget, lawmakers passed tax cuts that will reduce

tax revenue by more than \$250 million a year when fully implemented, draining revenue that could be used to help Wisconsin's public schools educate the next generation of workers.

Wisconsin has a long history of investing in public schools, but if lawmakers continue to prioritize tax cuts above public schools, students in Wisconsin public schools will continue to have increasingly crowded classrooms and fewer experienced teachers.

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Amounts presented in 2015 dollars.